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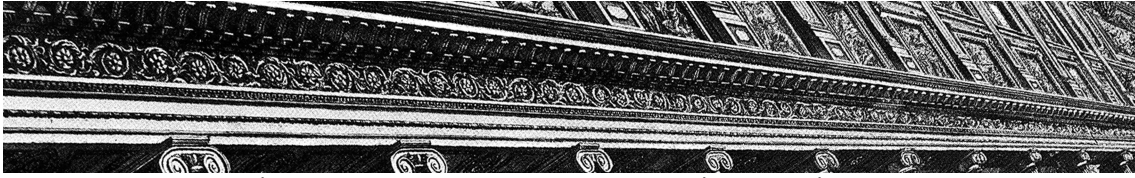
What Lacan said Re: architecture

Lorens Holm  
January 2000

## Introduction: certain stereognoses

Before the systematic establishment of geometric laws of perspective formulated at the end of the fifteenth century..., painting passed through a stage in which various artifices made it possible to structure space. The double band that appears in the sixth century on the wall of *Santa Maria Maggiore* is one way of treating certain stereognoses.... The important thing is that at a given moment one arrives at illusion. Around it one finds a sensitive spot, a lesion, a locus of pain, a point of reversal of the whole of history of art...; that point concerns the notion that the illusion of space is different from the creation of emptiness. It is this that the appearance of anamorphosis at the end of the sixteenth century represents.<sup>1</sup>

In this quote from Seminar 7 *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan recaps a recent session on anamorphosis in which he discusses architecture and its relation to painting. Architecture is that which is 'organised around emptiness'. A trawl through the indices of Lacan's Seminars shows that this is the only place Lacan uses *architecture* explicitly, and discusses architecture's general conditions, at least in so far as these conditions are deemed primitive. This is surprisingly little, given that critical discourse revolving around issues of representation/perception in architecture, have followed the lead of the visual arts in founding itself on the gaze. This discourse references the section in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-*



*Analysis* (Seminar 11), called 'What is a picture', where the imaginary register has its definitive statement, but where architecture is not discussed and barely mentioned. Lacan also develops the imaginary register in Seminar 1 *Freud's Papers on Technique*, Seminar 7, and Seminar 13 (unpublished). This paper will attempt to shift the grounds of the discussion of representation in architecture to these less known works. It will relate Lacan's idea of emptiness to the critical bits of *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, in particular the structure of the scopic field, dominated by the screen and the *objet a*.

*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* has not entered the discourse of representation in architecture or the visual arts, even though it is Lacan's major work on visual culture and the arts. It treats of similar ground to Kant's *Critique of Judgement*: the beautiful, the good, the relation of man to nature and God, sublimation, art, and architecture. For instance, Hal Foster does not reference the above quote in *The Return of the Real*, which seems central to a thesis about art as a screen for the emergence of originary trauma in the works of Warhol, Mary Kelly, and other contemporary artists.<sup>2</sup> Nor does the corresponding architectural discourse, which addresses how architecture situates the subject of perception in the visual field. For instance, Beatriz Colomina, whose 'LeCorbusier and Photography' was the first paper I know to use the *operational montage* as a way of situating the subject of architecture, also makes no mention of this Seminar.<sup>3</sup>



Furthermore, no one writing in the visual arts and architecture has taken a close look at 'Baltrusaitis' excellent dictionary of anamorphoses' [S7p40] which is the source for most of Lacan's visual references, and which once known, explains a lot about what drives his arguments.<sup>4</sup> A visual argument motivates Lacan's text, but it is underplayed (latent? repressed?) by both Lacan (his text is not illustrated) and his readers (Baltrusaitis is overlooked in the literature). Lacan's knowledge of projection and anamorphosis and their relation to architecture comes from Baltrusaitis, who he cites in Seminars 7 and 11. His sensibility is sympathetic to Baltrusaitis' rhetoric/polemic, which positions perspective as a device which conflates realism and illusion, and which, when *ana-morphed*, produces *hallucinations*.<sup>5</sup>

It will be a fine day for Lacan studies, if someone unpacks Baltrusaitis. If there is an *imago* of modern subjectivity, it is provided by the complex of visual references which the Baltrusaitis text assembles. It brings together the optics of Newton and Descartes, and the perspective and projective geometry of Alberti, Niceron, Andrea Pozzo. This visual discourse includes also the tradition of optical devices like Durer's *camera lucida* and the *camera obscura*, and in a different register Plato's cave; all of which have the peculiar character of sharing affinity to both consciousness and architecture, in that they situate a subject in relation to a visual world. These connections are exploited by Lacan and used as resources for the development of the subject-gaze relation. Lacan's optical device introduced in Seminar 1 in the discussion of Freud's essay 'On Narcissism' is also part of this tradition.

This paper is concerned with what Lacan *said* about architecture, as a reconnaissance mission. While it may not matter what Lacan thought about architecture; and while it is far more important what architects who think about architecture think of Lacan; this paper is important because it brings into the discourse of representation, material which has largely been passed over. It is hoped that this paper will lead to a better understanding of architecture in its visual dimension, enabling discourse-building, which is the hard work, to continue.

#### Note

Although the English translation makes Baltrusaitis available to English language Lacan studies, it is of limited value because it is derived from the second edition (Lacan would have had the first) whose layout was revised.<sup>6</sup> The relation of text to images has a directness in the first edition, which gives it a polemic, manifesto-like quality, which is lost to the coffee table production values evinced by the later editions. (The first give-away that something is amiss are the endpapers which have been printed white on black. What significance could white on black have in this context?) Since a close reading must be attentive to this relation, only the first edition is relevant to Lacan studies.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*. p140. Hereafter referred to as S7.

<sup>2</sup> Hal Foster, 'The return of the real' in *The return of the real*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

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<sup>3</sup> Beatriz Colomina, 'Le Corbusier and Photography', in *Assemblage 4*. See also my 'Reading through the mirror: Brunelleschi, Lacan, Le Corbusier' in *Assemblage 18*, which was inspired and influenced by her work.

<sup>4</sup> Jurgis Baltrusaitis, *Anamorphoses ou Perspectives Curieuses*. (Paris: Olivier Perrin Editeur, 1957). For instance, Damisch refers once to 'the now classic book of Jurgis Baltrusaitis' in *The Origin of Perspective*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1994).

<sup>5</sup> 'La perspective est généralement considérée dans l'histoire de l'art, comme un facteur de réalisme restituant la troisième dimension. C'est avant tout un artifice... Nous en traitons ici, les aspects fantastiques et le côté absurde.' About anamorphism, 'C'est un rébus, un monstre, un prodige.' And 'Le sujet de cette étude est l'histoire d'une illusion où le réel et l'apparence se trouvent artificiellement disjoints par des savants et des artistes.' Anamorphism annihilates (anéantir) the natural order of things and their representation, by applying the same rules of representation as perspective does. After its invention, perspective can no longer be aligned with a science of reality. 'La perspective n'apparaît plus comme une science de la réalité. C'est une technique des hallucinations.'

<sup>6</sup> The second edition of Baltrusaitis, revised, enlarged, and retitled *Anamorphoses, ou Magie artificielle des effets merveilleux* (1969) was translated into English as *Anamorphic Art*. Trans. by W.J.Strachan. (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1977).

## Architecture in 3D: Anamorphosis

### Emptiness

The opening quote proposed that painting and architecture are bound up with each other in *certain stereognoses*; and suggested that these knowledges notwithstanding, painting and architecture are bound up with illusion, the nemesis of knowledge.<sup>7</sup> It summarises the previous chapter, 'Marginal Comments', where Lacan introduced architecture in the discussion of anamorphism, in other words, in a discussion of the role and function of projection, and insists that the development of architecture is tied to the development of painting.

'There is behind it [anamorphism, the meaning of anamorphism] the whole history of architecture as well as that of painting, their combination and the history of this combination.' He proposes that architecture like perspective painting 'can be defined as something organised around emptiness' [S7, p135]; and later, in the chapter 'The Death of God', that architecture enters the symbolic order by a process of 'primitive sublimation' [S7 p175].

This emptiness and its subsequent sublimation bears some scrutiny because if it is not trivial, it is enigmatic. Teasing out the different iterations of this emptiness in Lacan's text and in architectural discourse is the main function of this paper. We assume that although it may be related to the simple and obvious fact that both the lines of a one-point perspective and the lines of the nave of a church - to which one-point perspective has its paradigmatic application in the work of, say, Brunelleschi - enclose empty space, this cannot be the whole of its

meaning. For Lacan tells us that this emptiness and Holbein's death's head anamorphosis are related to Freud's *Das Ding*, the thing, 'the Freudian Thing'.

In the first place, we might ask about this title, why marginal? Margins of psychoanalysis? Marginally important? Marginal as pertaining to edges, contours, walls, the enclosures, of spaces and forms? Marginal as a (military) strategy, as a way to get a better fix on the centre (in order to hit a bullseye, you have to stand back from your target)? Like Derrida's *Margins*. Marginal in that they concern art, religion and science which all dance around a central something (real, unattainable) called the *Freudian Thing*? Art represses, religion displaces, and science repudiates the *Freudian Thing*, all of which tropes are different forms of sublimation.[S7 pp129, 134]<sup>8</sup>

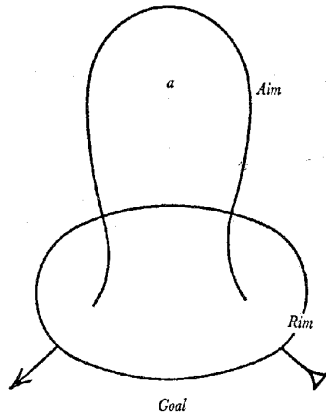
We know where this is heading. Dispense with the conclusion now, so that we can trace an anamorphic line. By glancing forward, we may relate this emptiness, this *thing*, to the articulation of desire in the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*: to the blind spot in the visual field, that which in vision always escapes vision. We posit that which escapes desire in the architectural field; and ask how desire as it manifests architecturally remains unsatisfied in architecture. This paper thus presages the concept of architectural desire: an architectural blind spot, lack, *objet a*, or simply, shortcoming, which signifies desire.

This glance reveals a shift in Lacan's thought in the four years between Seminars 7 and 11. In 7 Lacan says that architecture and painting are organised around emptiness. In the discussion of the visual field in Seminar 11, he has all but ceased talking about architecture. And emptiness

has been replaced by the blind spot, *scotoma*. It is as if he now regards only painting as the proper instantiation and representation of the field of vision, but not architecture. (Architecture does not represent space, it is space.) This paper will not pursue this shift in Lacan's thought, except to resist it. This paper is possible only if architecture is representation; and it is difficult to understand how, on Lacan's terms, architecture can be stripped of this role. For in the intensely reflective, paranoid, and hallucinatory register in which Lacan's thought exists, everything is representation.

First, Seminar 7. *The Thing* is associated with desire and the real, that which is beyond symbolisation and imagery, which is the object of the *tuché* (the sneeze) or missed encounter with the real, and which is always screened by words and images in the process of repetition. I jump again to the language of *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* because Evans tells us that *the Thing* is not used again after Seminar 7.<sup>9</sup> It is replaced by the lost object in later Seminars, and by the *objet petit a* in 'The Transference and the Drives'. In Seminar 7, *Das Ding* is 'the beyond-of-the signified' (a nod to Kant and things-in-themselves)<sup>10</sup>. The subject's relation to it is 'characterised by primary effect, prior to any repression'. [S7p54] It is thus not unconscious material, which Lacan maintains is a function of language i.e. *symbolisation*, and whose main entry point to the unconscious is through repression. In the same context, it is referred to as 'the primary object' which 'failed to give satisfaction', and is related to desire and the pleasure principle.

Similarly, it is remarkable that, in order to illustrate the



dimension of this *Verkehrung*, he should choose *Schaulust*, the pleasure of seeing, and what he cannot designate other than by the combination of two terms in *sado-masochism*. When he speaks The drive is always a return journey.

In Seminar 7, *the Thing* is involved in a similar hydraulics of desire as that of the *objet a*. In connection with the pleasure principle: 'That is *Das Ding* insofar as, if he is to follow the path of his pleasure, man must go around it'. [S7p95] In connection with art: 'it being understood that a work of art always involves

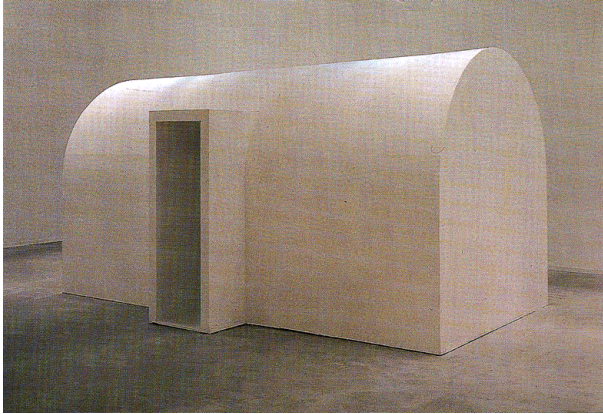
encircling the Thing'. [S7p141] It functions in the same ways as the aim, or object of desire, which is that unknowable object which the drive circles around but never attains. The drive is always a return journey. For instance, in connection with the oral drive, Lacan describes its aim as 'the presence of a hollow, a void, which can be occupied by any object and whose agency we know only on the form of the lost object, the *petit a*. The *objet a* is not the origin of the oral drive. It is not introduced as the original food, it is introduced from the fact that no food will ever satisfy the oral drive, except by circumnavigating the eternally lacking object.' [FFCP pp179-80]

Architecture is organised around emptiness in the same way that the drives circle around the *objet a*. This emptiness manifests in the visual world of architecture, which architecture can never fill. It might enclose this emptiness literally, in the sense that if architecture is about creating enclosure - usually with walls, usually to

protect its inhabitants from beasts and murderers - then this enclosure encloses emptiness. Except that if it is literal, then the emptiness must always escape, like the tomato seed which always skitters away when we put our finger on it. And if not literally, then the architecture activity, (the will to architecture corresponding to the thrust of the drive), then this activity is itself a double gesture, both a compulsive acknowledgement and screening out of originary loss and traumatic encounter with the real. It will remain unresolved at this point, how literally or metaphorically we are entitled to take the enclosing function of architecture. We merely point out now that Lacan's text is always in several registers, and we leave ambiguous for the moment the two registers: architecture as enclosing emptiness and architecture as circling an originary lost object.

Lacan's argument continues with an historical/analogical account: Architecture's role is subsequently taken over by painting, a role which it fully achieved with the invention of perspective. At certain moments, classical architecture attempts to recapture the role taken over by painting, by making use of the devices of perspective. With the invention of anamorphism several hundred years after perspective, the illusionism that had been perspective is shown to be what it really is, a signifier for some other hidden reality which emerges from behind illusion. The surprise/shock/interest provoked by anamorphism signifies the real the way the disgust of shit, as opposed to shit itself, signifies the real. Anamorphism is related to, or is an act of, sublimation, which is an effect of the way the signifier (the symbolic order) screens us from the real. By a kind of sublimation which





An originary architecture,  
Absalon, *Cellule No.1*, 1992

harks back to Hegel's *Aufhebung*, the illusionism which was embedded in the imaginary order, enters the symbolic.

It is worth quoting *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* at length because Lacan offers an account of primitive

architecture which, by its august and originary tone, its invocation of teleology and necessity, places his writing within the tradition of origins to which the primitive hut, architecture's myth of origins, belongs. The primitive hut is always empty, not just because it awaits its first occupants, but because it is self-referential. Laugier's hut is not an essay in occupation, but in the inter-relation of architectural components. Occupation comes later, as something outside and accidental to the essential work of architecture. Hegel's account of the originary architecture speaks of a corresponding emptiness, in a similarly sonorous tone. Further, his account of the succession of the arts is a gloss on Lacan's history of architecture - the passing of the baton of emptiness, first to painting, then to language.

This object [anamorphism] could never have been produced, never have had a necessary meaning without a whole preceding development. There is behind it the whole history of architecture as well as that of painting, their combination and the history of this combination.

...[P]rimitive architecture can be defined as something organised around emptiness. That is also the authentic impression that the forms of a cathedral like Saint Mark's gives us, and it is the true meaning of all architecture. Then subsequently, for economic reasons [because it is cheaper?], one is satisfied with painting images of that architecture, one learns to paint architecture on the walls of architecture; and painting, too, is first of all something that is organised around emptiness. Since it is a matter of finding once more the sacred emptiness of architecture in the less marked medium of painting, the attempt is made to create something that resembles it more and more closely, that is to say, perspective is discovered.<sup>11</sup>

....

From the moment that perspective was discovered in painting, a form of architecture appears that adopts the perspectivism of painting... Go and see Palladio's theatre in Vicenze,... Neo-classical architecture submits itself to the laws of perspective, plays with them, and makes them its own. That is, it places them [the laws] inside of something [architecture] that was done in painting in order to find once again the emptiness of primitive architecture.

From that point on one is entangled in a knot which seems to flee increasingly from the meaning of this emptiness. ...[T]he Baroque return to the play of forms, to all manner of devices, including anamorphosis, is an effort to restore the true meaning of artistic enquiry; artists use the discovery of the property of lines to make something emerge that is precisely there where one has lost one's bearings or, strictly speaking, nowhere.

Rubens' painting that suddenly appears in the place of the unintelligible image reveals what is at issue here. At issue, in an analogical or anamorphic form, is the effort to point once again to the fact that what we seek in the illusion is something in which the illusion as such in some way transcends itself,

destroys itself, by demonstrating that it is only there as a  
signifier.

And it is this which lends primacy to the domain of language  
above all, since with language we only ever have to do with the  
signifier...[S7 pp135-6]

In *The Aesthetics*,<sup>12</sup> Hegel writes, 'The first of the  
particular arts..., is architecture considered as a fine art.  
Its task lies in so manipulating external inorganic nature  
that it becomes cognate to mind, as an artistic outer  
world.' (In *cognate to mind*, there is implicit the idea  
that architecture is in a narcissistic relation to its  
subject.) It is afflicted with a species of emptiness  
which is beyond the contingent emptiness of an unoccupied  
building. 'In this material and in such forms, the ideal  
as concrete spirituality does not admit of begin realised.  
Hence the reality which is represented in them remains  
contrasted with the Idea, as something external which it  
has not penetrated, or has penetrated only to establish an  
abstract relation.' Hegel's originary architecture is  
empty because Spirit is not yet in it. Architecture  
conforms to generic rules of composition (symmetry) and  
physics, and it is still mired in its materiality, like  
Lacan's *Thing*, which he calls a brute 'dumb  
reality'[S7p54]. Spirit is not yet embodied in the forms  
of architecture, the way they will be, first in classical  
Greek sculpture and then in Renaissance painting. It is an  
empty temple awaiting the entry of God in a 'lightning-  
flash of individuality'.<sup>13</sup>

For the Lacan of Seminar 7, anamorphosis recalls a  
psychic prior reality screened by architecture and

perspective, a priority which seems to be both temporal and logical. With anamorphism, architecture and perspective enter the symbolic order, which relates this screening function to what Lacan will later call repetition (the return of the real as an encounter with nonsense or horror) and the automaton (the screen of signifiers, which screens the encounter with the real).<sup>14</sup> Hegel's architecture represents a degree zero of Spirit, a condition of Spiritual entropy before matter is fully formed into an art in which we can recognise Spirit. Architecture is empty of Spirit. In this sense, architecture is keeping something out. Hegel's sublimation (*Aufhebung*) is the engine which drives the succession of the particular arts. Kojève defines *aufhebung* as 'to annul or destroy' and 'to preserve or carry forward'. Each particular art is destroyed, replaced, preserved by the next one, so that even poetry, the last of the arts and the acme of Spiritual expression, carries within it the hard empty kernel of architecture. Architecture... memorial to the Spiritually bereft, to Death, to ultimate loss. For Hegel, architecture becomes the emptiness carried forward in languages. Architecture the unutterable. For Lacan, it is in the act of sublimation of anamorphosis-as-image by anamorphosis-as-signifier, that we are reminded of the unutterable real which architecture and perspective circle around.

#### Baltrusaitis and Anamorphism

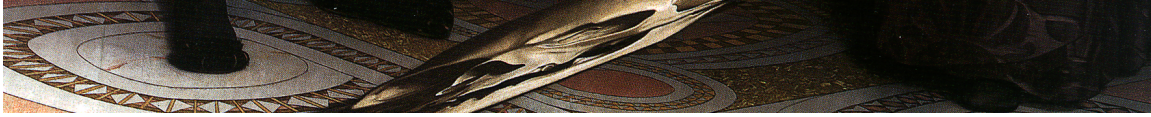
Lacan introduces anamorphism with three examples taken from Baltrusaitis. 1) The *vanitas* anamorphism in Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. 'It looks roughly like fried eggs' [S7p135]; '...the effect of an erection' [4FCPA p88].

2)An 18 metre long fresco in a chapel *built in Descartes time*. Both of which only become recognisable images when viewed from marginal positions. And 3)an anamorphic copy of a Rubens' crucifixion, which is organised around a cylindrical mirror.

- About the Holbein: 'The pleasure is found in seeing its emergence from an indecipherable form.' [S7p135] This is also the pleasure of psychoanalysis. Lacan introduces anamorphism in a way which suggests the exegesis of unconscious material in a visual, as opposed to verbal, psychoanalysis. As if visual material might hide something, thereby having an unconscious dimension.<sup>15</sup>
- About the Rubens copy: 'It is formed of a polished cylinder..., and around it you put a kind of bib or flat surface on which there are also indecipherable lines...[Y]ou see the image...emerge in the cylindrical mirror.' It recalls the lamella which defines the rim structure of the drives (the flat seminal *homme-lette*, Descartes' little man, spittle of the erogenous zones) from which the thrust emerges as a kind of distortion of its surface. The whole thing is vaguely erotic. What emerges on this erect cylindrical mirror is an image of the crucifixion, Christ's lithe limp erect agonised body.
- About the chapel: 'you can see for a brief moment the extraordinarily dispersed lines come together and perceive the body of the scene.' Like the mirror image brings together into a coherent image the discombobulated body of the infant.

### *The Ambassadors*

What initially attracts is the sumptuous rendition of expensive equipment and other worldly goods. (For the men



who have everything.) The death's head image is put into relation with these goods. Because of the projections, one can only either see the goods or the skull, but never both together. The smear seems to hover in front, not behind, the space. Lacan compares it to an erection and to seminal fluid. (Imagine the instant this photograph was taken: the artist is about to strut in front of his painting, preceded by a massive erection). Death is the ultimate loss. So the smear<sup>16</sup>, associated with desire and the body, the erogenous zones, appears as a screen in front of the painting, like Parrhasios' curtain, and not behind it. And death, the ultimate loss - *objet a* - only appears on the oblique view, the view you get when you try to peer behind the painting to see what it veils.

Anamorphism also illustrates literally how optical projection which defines the world transparent to our vision can become opaque when it undergoes the distortions associated with desire and death. The smear seems to cover an area of the pictorial space, and only becomes transparent again when the skull appears. This is not a matter of unfogging the glass, but of changing position. The lesson of anamorphism is that no matter where we are positioned in a space, there is another position in space which we might occupy, from which point everything as we see it now, would be anamorphic. Anamorphism reminds us

that there is always another point of view, another take on things, from the position of an Other, which is invisible or opaque to us. Said the jilted lover, '*You never look at me from the place from which I see you*'.<sup>17</sup> It is associated literally and metaphorically with desire, for position, vector, and spin of the viewer are indicators of desire.

#### Rubens copy

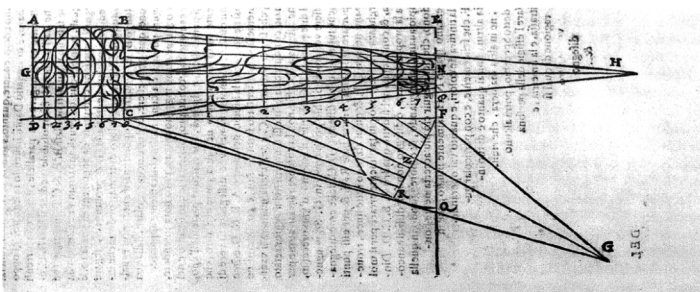
The cylindrical catoptric anamorphism is a species of optical device. It has affinities to architecture. Unlike the other examples which remain flat on the canvas, this one is produced by elements distributed in 3-dimensional space: a vertical cylinder (caryatid) and a horizontal surface (plinth). They set up relationships with each other. The fact that they are primarily optical only means that they do not explore the full range of relationships that obtain in an architecture; this device is a model of architecture and not a full fledged building.

Christ leaps out of the primordial soup, like Botticelli's Venus. The vertical cylinder transforms the drawing into something readable - visible and intelligible - the way the elevation of a building transforms the plan into something visible and inhabitable. It is a vision machine, in that it makes visible what had been invisible. It is an analogue of creation, in that it transforms a formless mass of colour and swirling lines, into a well-formed object that stands up in a space. It traverses painting from abstraction to figuration and from figuration to illusion.

The Rubens copy demonstrates that anamorphism is a 3-dimensional painting, because it is constituted by a distortion or swelling in the visual field. A visual image

literally stands up; in order for it to be intelligible, it has to stand up. This is not a distortion of the image (Photoshop™ image-stretching functions are actually not what anamorphism is about, even though the effect may be the same). Like the tower scene in *VERTIGO*, in which Jimmy Stewart's fear of heights and desire for Kim Novak manifests as a simultaneous elongation and flattening of cameraspaces, anamorphism is a distortion of the visual field itself, in so far as that field is a function of projection. This may be more obvious in the case of the cylindrical mirror, but the same thing happens with the *vanitas* skull. In that case, the area of the picture plane upon which the skull is projected rotated into the third dimension. The plane upon which 3-dimensional space is represented rotates, or otherwise moves, into 3-dimensional space. The picture plane is an opaque surface which may appear transparent, but only from certain privileged angles.<sup>18</sup>

#### The Minim Bros. Chapels

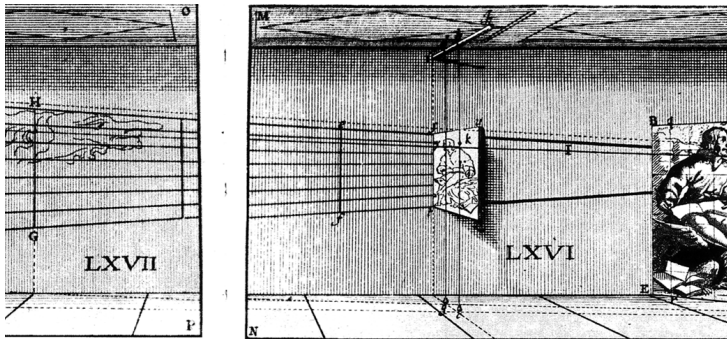


Lacan says very little about the chapels, the images of which are reproduced from the plates of optical

treatises by Jean-François Nicéron, and his contemporaries.<sup>19</sup> They show paintings projected obliquely onto the chapel walls of 'a convent of the Minim Friars in Rome as well as Paris' so as to form anamorphic paintings of the Saints.<sup>20</sup> These images are important because of their visual import to Lacan's argument.<sup>21</sup>



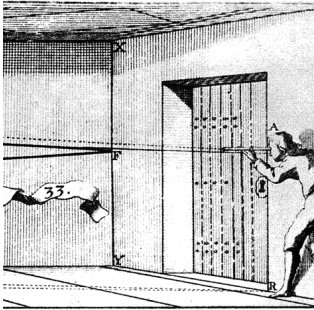
The anamorphic Saints are produced in an unusual way. Anamorphism is a species of projective geometry. It is the general case of projection through a plane, of which perspective projection is one limit. In this case the plane is set perpendicular to the principal line of projection, Alberti's *prince of rays*, the throne of vision. In the case of the vanitas skull, the plane of projection was rotated to an oblique angle to the prince of rays. In the Minim chapel engravings, the anamorphism is produced indirectly. A portrait of a Saint is shown mounted



perpendicular to the chapel wall and is then projected from the eye point so that it streaks the wall obliquely. In other words, the

anamorphism is produced by the transfer of an image from one plane to another. Anamorphism is presented as a relationship of picture planes set at angles to each other, one normal, one oblique, the latter of which happens to be architecture. The former way, links perspective and anamorphism in a continuum, but links it to a solitary projection point and plane; the latter involves anamorphism in a series of inter-projecting image planes. Whilst the former may suggest, although by no means entails, a species of prioritised Cartesian subject; the latter makes graphically explicit a universe of displaced images screens and multiple projection points, which will be sympathetic to the diagram of the scopic field, Lacan's *operational montage*, when he develops it 4 years later.

These chapel walls also begin to explain the unusual relation which Lacan posits between painting and architecture, as if painting were a paper thin liner on its interior walls. In the Nicéron engravings, the images are



literally projected upon the walls. In Lacan's account, architecture and painting are linked in an interactive exchange based on imitation, which becomes plausible when they are superimposed with such optical precision.

First painting imitates architecture. Then, when painting discovers perspective and can finally get it right, i.e. when painting has discovered the laws (stereognoses) which governed architecture (architecture's unconscious), architecture starts to imitate painting. It becomes possible for architecture to represent itself, as if its two-dimensional image were slide-projected upon its walls.

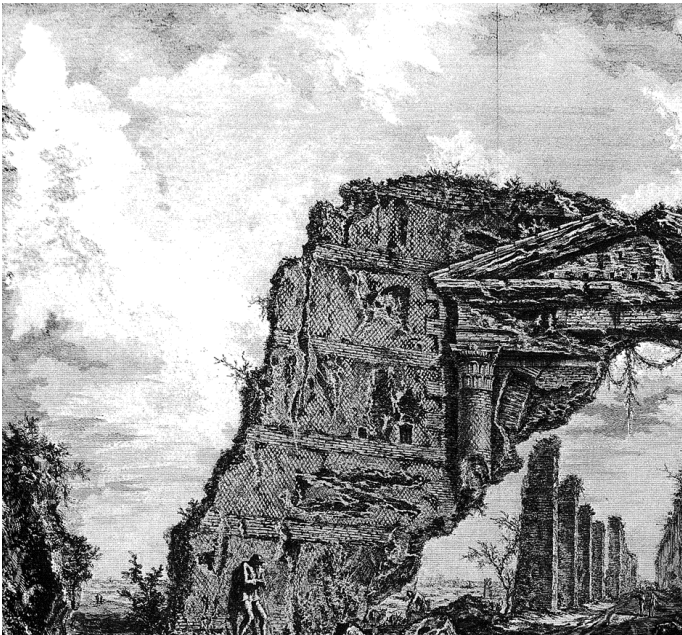
Apart from the intimation that painting is the ego image of architecture, and painting's history its psychoanalysis - in which the unconscious material of architecture is exposed, followed by a kind of transference - two related things are at work here. At this point (Brunelleschi, the early renaissance), architecture has passed into the discourse of representation. Architecture no longer merely encloses emptiness, or makes space: it represents it. This is a kind of mirror stage in the development of architecture, by which it enters the imaginary order. As if architecture might be at one and the same time architecture and the representation of architecture. The second point: this representational architecture is a symptom of the fact that in a world of optical projection (one-eyed, stationary) inaugurated by

the discovery of one-point perspective projection, there is an equivalence between 2- and 3- dimensional space; such that perspective is a 2-dimensional representation of a 3-dimensional space, and architecture is a 3-dimensional representation of a 2-dimensional space. Lacan does not say this, but it is a function of perspective projection, and it will have bearing on the characteristics of the scopic field, what I provisionally call the flattening of the screen, which we will enter later.

If we transfer the lesson in Lacan's discussion of anamorphism to architecture, then if architecture is organised around emptiness, it is not because it encloses emptiness, but because this architecture, like the picture surface with which it is identified, holds the emptiness out. (Do not interpret *organised around* too literally as *encloses*.) Emptiness aka the *Thing* lurks just behind the surface of the imaginary register, of which the picture plane is an analogue. The image we have perpetrated is that in the case of anamorphosis, the picture plane peels up or cracks, which threatens to reveal the reality outside. If we are unlucky, we might glimpse the real with a sidelong glance. There are other properties of an architecture which holds the real out: it is an architecture of pure surface, which cannot contemplate an underneath, a behind the coat of paint, because behind that coat of paint is the unimaginable. It must always only ever offer to view, more surface, even when the surface is scratched.

## Piranesi

In another register altogether, the register where the problem of architecture is a problem of language, Piranesi explored the emptiness of an architecture understood as a surface of representation. In the façade of Santa Maria Del Priorato or the walls of Piazza dei Cavalieri, the hard brittle detailing is set off against a palimpsest-like featureless substrate as if to indicate that the detailing is to be understood as a surface effect of language, with no structural, formal or geometric relationship to its substrate.



In the *Vedute di Roma*, Piranesi presents a shambolic and falling down classicism scattered amidst the modern fabric of Rome.<sup>22</sup> In 'Entrance to the Villa Sette Bassi', a Corinthian portal is little more than the rubble infill once

the cladding has fallen off. The architecture is literally a crumbling screen of limestone signifiers. Underneath is a reality which the language cannot contemplate because it has no means to acknowledge it. The monuments of Rome are shown to be only skin deep, about 50mm of limestone cladding. The real site of the classical language, the coveted solicited classicism, so structured so hard so

precise, so much the origin and foundation of the architecture of modern Rome, are the *informé*<sup>23</sup> steaming clots of undifferentiated lumpen masonry which are strewn all over via Appia, like Lacan's *dumb reality*. In 'The Lamella of David Lynch', Slavoj Zizek<sup>24</sup> aligns the real with the interior of the body. He cites the slimy ecto-bits which explode from the stomach in *Aliens*, which remain beyond what can be described in words and images, the symptom of which is the sense of horror they provoke. This is the lesson of Piranesi's Rome. What lies beneath the surface of architecture is an unstructured, undifferentiated, unarticulated reality.

There is a double gesture in Piranesi's work which distinguish his engravings from those of his contemporaries. Architecture is projected forward as a paper thin language system, at the same time it is retracted into a prelingual state of lumpenness. The symbolic order is exposed as a decorative effect upon the real.<sup>25</sup> Of course Piranesi's paper prints are screens too. The ruins do not really look like this. They are an effect of representation, and of the social conventions, ways of seeing, and other agitations of a sweaty mind; all of which structure representation.

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<sup>7</sup> stereo-, having or dealing with the three dimensions of space, or involving viewing with two eye pieces (as in a stereoscope), to get the effect of depth. -*gnosis*, knowledge, recognition (*Webster's 7<sup>th</sup> New Collegiate*). Thus *stereognosis* is either 3D knowledge or 2-eyed knowledge, which are not necessarily the same. Most of Lacan's examples are from the tradition of perspective representation (painting and optics), which assume the single eye. This bifurcation, so noted, is the beginning of an argument that the scopic field is

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not to be equated with the visual field, meaning the (two-eyed) visual world we are always in, nor that architecture should be understood as a built version of the scopic field, as image producing machine; although both scopic field and visual world/architecture are obviously related. For instance, one of the salient features of our visual field is that we are always moving in it; and one type of blind spot which Lacan does not countenance, is the thickening of the screen associated with speed, although desire is frequently associated with movement, and the drives are understood to travel around their object. The question of the relation of architecture or perspective to the scopic field is ambiguous in Lacan's text, as it is never clear whether Lacan uses them as metaphors for mental structures, or examples of psychoanalytic readings offered by way of example, etc. We will return to the question of metaphor later in this paper.

<sup>8</sup> Both *The Ambassadors* and *Las Meninas* displace interest from the centre of the painting (prince of rays, vanishing point, gaze) to the periphery, where the most significant elements occur (the skull, the light which animates the reflected space). '[I]n its relation to desire, reality appears only as marginal.' [4FCPA p.108]

<sup>9</sup> Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. (London: Routledge, 1996)

<sup>10</sup> Kant says that positing things-in-themselves is a logical conclusion of the ways we think about and represent objects in space and time, although 1) we can by definition never know them, and 2) they are consequently of no use to us whatsoever and thus not the objects of a legitimate enquiry. It is tempting to equate things-in-themselves with the Thing, especially as Lacan seems to (S7p55), but they are in totally different registers: one is a logical, the other a psychic boundary. At best there could be a correspondence.

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<sup>11</sup> This is the perspective by incremental approximation account of the development of perspective, as in John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987). First published 1957.

<sup>12</sup> Although it is not known how familiar Lacan was with Hegel's *Aesthetics*, these topics are also covered in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, with which Lacan was familiar through Kojève's lectures. Fragments of his course were compiled in Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: lectures on the phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. by James Nichols, edited by Allan Bloom, assembled by Raymond Queneau (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

<sup>13</sup> Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, (London: Penguin Classics, 1993), Bernard Bosanquet, trans., pp.90-91.

<sup>14</sup> See chapter 5, 'The Tuche and the Automaton' in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. See also Hal Foster's gloss on this in *The Return of the Real*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999). Pp. 132-38.

<sup>15</sup> For which see Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 33-93 for the dialectic of revealing and concealing in the work of, e.g., Duchamp and Max Ernst.

<sup>16</sup> The anamorphism looks as if Holbein smeared his paint by Freudian slop (sic), or in frustration and passion. It then dried. It suggests that the visual world is material, not abstract and transparent, but thick and gooey, rather like oil paint.

<sup>17</sup> 4FCPA, p.103. Italicised in the original. The full quote is 'When, in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that - *You never look at me from the place from which I see you*' The desire to close this gap would remain unfulfilled even if you were looking in the mirror, and the love was self love.

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<sup>18</sup> Anamorphic architectures are highly inflected by fear and desire, and other strong emotions. The most obvious examples are haunted houses, which are literally animated by psychic forces. Doors slam, floors seem strangely out of kilter, walls swell, there is a sense of being gazed at. The haunted house is a good example of Lacanian sublimation. In *The Haunting of Hill House*, the swelling of a wall is not only a visual image. There is nothing scary about a swelling wall, per se. The degree to which it is scary is the degree to which it signifies the presence of spirits.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-François Nicéron, *La Perspective Curieuse*. (Paris: Jean Du Puis, 1638). Revised, translated into Latin, and republished with better plates as *Thaumaturgus Opticus*. (Paris: Jean Du Puis, 1646)

<sup>20</sup> Not clear what the 'as well as Paris' referred to, until I discovered that he was quoting from a picture caption in Baltrusaitis. Lacan was standing in front of the class reading out of the book and got a little ahead of himself. This is a textual punctum, a moment of recognition which seems to slice through the media of representation to a past present moment. Lacan slipped up a couple of times. He mis-locates *The Ambassadors* to the Louvre, and mis-identifies the Minim chapel as Jesuit. Anamorphism is a species of visual joke, a kind of interior *ha ha*, which can be lumped together with jokes, puns, slips-of-the-tongue, and all the other psychic detritus which Freud shows us to be the screen of the unconscious, in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*.

<sup>21</sup> Marcel Duchamp was also very interested in Nicéron's work on projection in connection with *Etant Donnés: 1. la chute d'eau, 2. le gaz d'éclairage* (1946-66), which is about a certain stereognosis. Duchamp builds a 3-dimensional (literal depth) perspective (phenomenal depth) for two eyes, thus mobilising parallax and depth of field.



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<sup>22</sup> John Wilton-Ely, *The Mind and Art of Giovanni Battista Piranesi*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978). Wilton-Ely contains the complete plates of the *Vedute* and the *Carceri*. Piranesi is an easy one, because the body of work is so vast, and so full of symptoms. Piranesi was involved in a vicious polemic conducted at the level of language, about the origin of Roman classicism in Etruscan or Greek architecture. Piranesi supported Etruscan as the foundation for a cultural hegemony and priority of Roman classicism over Greece.

<sup>23</sup> The concept of the *informé*. See Bataille's *informé*. See also Lacan's *homme-lette*, which forms the rim (as in anus), the site of the drives, which occupies the site of his erogenous zones.

<sup>24</sup> In Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus, editors, *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), pp.205-220.

<sup>25</sup> More or less what Tafuri described as a two-pronged attack on language and abstraction. Tafuri called him *the evil genius* on account of his demolition job on language. See Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: avant-gardes and architecture from Piranesi to the 1970's*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), pp.25-54, in which he defines operations on language as the project of the avant-garde. Many people were in the *Vedute* business in 18<sup>th</sup> century Rome, but only Piranesi was able to convey a sense of the emerging malevolence and horror which lurks beneath this (architectural) language. In the engravings of e.g. Vasi, Paninni or Canaletto, the ruins are restored or romanticised to convey a sense of melancholy or nostalgia.

## Architecture in 2D: *trompe-l'œil*

### Zeuxis and Parrhasios

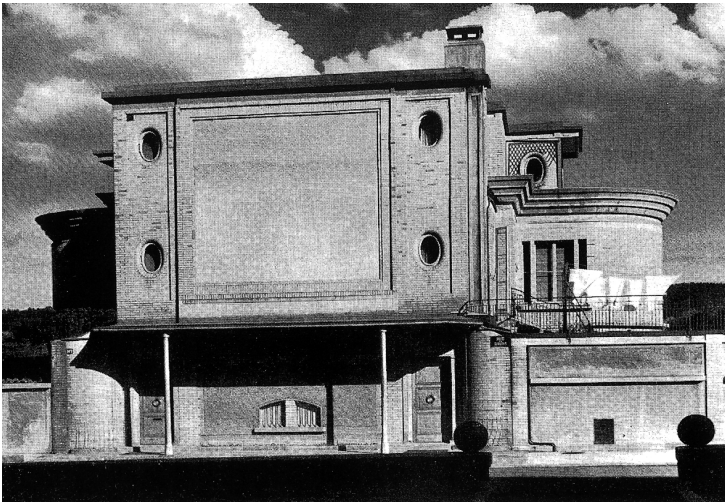
In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Zeuxis and Parrhasios have a paintoff to determine which of them is the best painter. Apparently in ancient Greece, this means the most illusionistic painter. Zeuxis goes first. He paints a still life: when he unveils it, birds try to eat the grapes. When Zeuxis tries to unveil Parrhasios' painting, the veil turns out to be painted. Zeuxis could fool the birds, Parrhasios could fool a painter.<sup>26</sup> The painting turns out to be a veil (is a veil a still life?), which is what Alberti said 2000 years later. Ryman's pure white paintings have the same aspiration.<sup>27</sup> They expose painting as a veil. The white ground signifies not only the limitless possibilities for representation but points out that every painting conceals a piece of the visual world. Every painting is also a blank spot. Most painting tries to hide this fact by being so full of life. The white walls of the gallery conspire with painting. The neutrality of the white wall suggests that there is nothing significant behind the painting for the painting to conceal.

The whiteness of Ryman's paintings signifies that it is a blank. A painting blank or template, like any template, is both empty and full of possibilities. In this sense, Parrhasios painted the first white painting. Analogously, a blank or white architecture would be empty. It would proclaim its allegiance to the cultural discourse of whiteness through its originary status. It is important to distinguish this white architecture from white walls.

Again white walls are a kind of decoy. White walls do not an empty architecture make. Such an originary architecture might not have white walls, but it would have white space. It would be empty the way Hegel's originary architecture is empty of Spirit, inert, the opposite of haunted. It would not be featureless, it would not be stripped of its individuating characteristics (Parrhasios' veil had folds like Leonardo's drapery studies; Ryman's work is rich with tapings brushings and other framing devices) but it would expose architecture's originary devices. It would be a blank, so that it could be full of generative possibilities. It is easy to see the stripped down forms of Absalon's *Cells*<sup>28</sup> in this light; we are perhaps only a little less conditioned now to see Laugier's neo-classical primitive hut - reduced to posts and rafters - in the same light.<sup>29</sup> We have to ask what this emptiness of architecture is.

We might look a little more closely at the emptiness of Parrhasios' veil. In Zeuxis' painting the birds are fooled because the grapes are not there. Painted grapes are not grapes. In this sense, representation signifies the absence of what is represented. The same could be said about Parrhasios' painting. Zeuxis is fooled because the curtain is not there. The painted curtain signifies the absence of a real curtain. The difference - and here we get into one of those conundrums of self-reference - is that the curtain *is* blank: in other words, it is a blank. Like Ryman's white blanks, Parrhasios' painting is not concealing anything because it is not representing anything.<sup>30</sup> Whereas the painted grapes signify the absence of a presence (grapes), the painted painting is still a painting, it signifies the presence of an absence

(painting). If there is anything which the curtain could be said to be concealing, it would be a painting, and a painting - as representation - signifies an absence. To reiterate, Zeuxis thought he was looking at the absence of a painting, i.e. a real curtain covering a painting; it turned out to be the absence of a curtain, i.e. a real painting.



The presence of an absence

In the same sense, an architecture which represents itself, like Lacan's projected architecture, might disappear behind its representation. Such an architecture would signify the

presence of an absence. Works which intentionally problematise representation, like the monumental blank framed façade panel of LeCorbusier's *Villa Schwob*, proclaim their own absence.<sup>31</sup> Although it is not possible to make formal generalisations, we might look for symptoms of this phenomenon in the empty façade or the excessively repetitive one, which effect an erasure.<sup>32</sup>

In 'What is a picture', Lacan distinguishes 'the natural function of the lure' from 'that of *trompe-l'œil*', and concomitantly the response of the birds from that of Zeuxis. The birds are hungry. They respond to a basic instinct at the level of the body (Freud compares hunger to libido). Their response has nothing to do with the illusionistic aspects of representation. Whatever says



Refraction through a denser medium

grapes to birds 'would have to be something more reduced, something closer to the sign'. Ducks will seek cover if a shadow passes over them, even though the shadow does not resemble that of a hawk. Zeuxis is a traveller in the imaginary register, in this he has one over on the birds. He responds in a way that already implicates him in the economy of revealing and concealing,

which is the mark of illusionistic representation. Lacan says that he tried to pull back the veil of the visual field to see what was hidden behind, which Lacan defines as the *objet a*, the absent object which is the aim of desire, but which never satisfies desire. This is the absence which, in its different manifestations, motivates all the drives. (The thrust of the drive is always a return journey.) His response is telling for it acknowledges the status of the visual world as a screen for originary loss. Imagine if, following Zeuxis, following Alberti, everyone's impulse in the presence of a painting was to look behind it. This is Lacan's point, that every perspective, like the imaginary register of which it is a homologue, is a veil.

Lacan says that you don't deceive someone by showing him a painting of grapes, you deceive him by showing him a 'painting of a veil,...something which incites him to ask what is behind it'. The point of *trompe-l'œil* painting is not to give 'an illusory equivalence of the object', i.e.

to fool us about grapes, but to fool us about painting. '[P]ainting pretends to be something other than what it is'. We think it is a curtain, in fact it is a painting. This is evidenced by the fact that the pleasure of *trompe-l'œil* is the surprise of discovering that you were fooled when the representation does not move with your point of view. 'For it appears at that moment as something other than it seemed, or rather it now seems to be that something else.... This something else is the *objet petit a*.' [4FCPA p112]

Lacan is thinking of architectural *trompe-l'œil*, where a wall is painted as the seamless continuation of a space. This relates to the painted walls in Lacan's history of architecture (Seminar 7). This is the case where the illusion is most markedly destroyed when you move out of position, for the painted lines no longer align with the built ones. When an architectural *trompe-l'œil* is seen from the wrong angle, the space appears to have refracted through a thicker medium. It *ana-morphs*. The moment we move from our preferred position in the **Hall of Perspectives**, and realise that porch and view of Rome are illusions, is the moment they signify the opacity of our transparent visual field, behind which hides the real.<sup>33</sup>

Most stage spaces are a little anamorphed; Lacan mentions the most famous and most self-consciously classical one, Palladio's *Teatro Olimpico* in Vicenza. One of the few anamorphic spaces to straddle the imaginary line between reality and representation, and hence one of the most disturbing, is the choir of Bramante's *Santa Maria Presso San Satiro* in Milan (1486) which is a kind of perspective painting in high relief. The total depth of the choir, which looks from the entry to be about ten

metres deep, is about half a metre. Viewed from the altar, it is almost morphed beyond recognition, like Holbein's *vanitas*.<sup>34</sup> These spaces place the laws of perspective 'inside of something that was done in painting in order to find once again the emptiness of primitive architecture'. They are not identical with the spaces they represent.

We now have two bifurcating possibilities both of which are functions of Lacan's screen: an absent 3-dimensional architecture, absent behind what it represents, and which functions like the *objet a* in the field of architecture; and a *trompe-l'œil* architecture which signifies that the visual field is not transparent, but conceals something real. The screen is the middle term between the eye and the gaze in the scopic field. It is the opaque surface which carries spatial representations: it opens out onto a space (think Peruzzi); and it conceals the world (think Palladio). This needs now to be related more directly to the discourse of representation.

#### Architectural Discourse: Literal and phenomenal transparency

In their seminal article, Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky delineated modernism in terms of two types of transparency, which has a bearing on the *emptiness* of Lacan's architecture and the later development of the screen in the imaginary register.<sup>35</sup> They distinguish the literal transparency of the glass walls and open floor plates of Gropius's *Dessau Bauhaus* (1925-26), from the phenomenal transparency evinced by the facades and interior spaces of LeCorbusier's *Villa Stein* at Garches (1927), in which two or more forms interpenetrate without optically

destroying each other. The latter is related to the tendency in the still life paintings of, e.g., Leger and LeCorbusier, for the objects to share contours and therefore to oscillate between distribution in spatial depth and alignment on the picture plane. Whilst the authors allow both *Bauhaus* and Garches to retain their status as icons of modern architecture, there is no doubt about which they consider to be more interesting. The one has a transparency which resides in the material properties of glass; the other is conceptual, and occurs despite the materiality, and perhaps because of the opacity, of its constituents. It is the mark of a reading event.

Phenomenal transparency is the opposite of architectural *tromp-l'œil* painting. Depth exists at the surface of the screen, not behind it. Instead of what looks deep turning out to be flat, flatness turns out to have depth. Phenomenal transparency is a kind of opacity in the field of vision, which occurs precisely when we cease to see the plane surface as transparent giving on to



Architecture and the representation of depth

depth, and begin to see it as a screen. The facades and spaces of *Villa Stein* seem to oscillate between these two conditions: between a transparency which opens onto the presence of depth and an opacity which insists on its representation. The literal

transparency of glass modernism has an affinity to *tromp-l'œil* where visual space is projected upon the plane surface of a wall. The transparency of the *Bauhaus* is effected by seeing the interior through its elevations.



The optical (one-eyed) relationships in both cases are similar. The difference between the *Bauhaus* and *tromp-l'œil* is that the *Bauhaus* never ana-morphs and loses its transparency. It never exploits this representational capacity of architecture.

The screen in both Lacan (*operational montage*) and Freud (screen memories, dream façade) is not so simple as the plane surface involved in optical projection. For Lacan's and Freud's screens have quite different properties from the slide projector screen. The dreamer is not a projector and does not thereby project images onto a screen, nor does the dreamer look through a glass to the scene seen through the glass. Rather the screen screens a reality which is otherwise unattainable. The content of the dream is only accessible as façade. The dream is like Piranesi's monuments: no matter how deeply they are gouged, we never see inside them, but only more surface. Unlike the façade of a building, it is not possible to step through it to inhabit the plan, and do all the things that architects do when they have free reign to explore a building, like locate the spaces which correspond to elements on the façade. In the world of the dream, more analysis never leads inside the dream in the sense of passing through its façade into something else which corresponds to it, but only to more façade. It is a short step from here to the register of the imaginary in which there is only ever the screen and to the visual world where, like Piranesi's architecture of pure surface, everything is a surface for representation.

We can blame the invention of perspective on the thickening of the screen and its delamination from the visual field, as if before the invention of perspective,

screen and field were one transparent thing. Or perhaps before the invention of *tromp-l'œil* illusionism, but this was only possible in a systematic way once perspective was invented and whole architectural spaces could be treated illusionistically. Any 2D representation of space - be it Peruzzi *tromp-l'œil*, pre-perspectival fresco by Giotto, or Ryman 'blank' - will screen what is behind it from view. This is the general quandary which representation finds itself in; and even *transparencies* like 'The bride stripped bare...', Even', must be understood in these terms. When this representation is a perspective or photograph it becomes problematic, because of the systematic one-to-one correspondence between 2D surface and 3D visual field. This identity suggests that the visual field is always a screen; that it is opaque like the photograph or the painting. Before the invention of perspective, the visual world was reality. What you saw was what you got. With the invention of perspective and the identification of the visual field with its representation on a 2-dimensional plane, the visual world becomes imaginary, with the screen screening a reality we know not. It took 500 years after the invention of perspective for psychoanalysis to invent a subject which was adequate to this condition.

The illusion of illusionism is not so much that we forget the opacity of the painted surface and think that we are looking at a real space, but that we forget the phenomenal opacity of the visual field itself. We forget that lurking in the fringes of thought and consciousness is the terrifying possibility that the visual world is itself a screen, and that it screens something from our vision. In architecture, this illusion is perpetrated by surfaces with literal transparency. It is an illusion foisted upon

us all the time, every time we look out a window, but particularly in certain works of modern architecture like the *Bauhaus*, whose spaces unfold as a matter of transparency. The screen-like nature of the visual field – and of architecture which is its built form – only becomes apparent in moments of phenomenal transparency; moments when, standing before *Villa Stein*, the world becomes opaque.

Not many architectures which are capable of entertaining this possibility, will entertain what lurks behind the screen. LeCorbusier's work does not indulge in this level of malevolence. We saw how Piranesi's *Vedute* exposed architecture's status as a threatened and threatening surface. It is arguable that he could only do this in the obsessive and agitated environment of the engravings where the architecture was already identified with the surface of representation (his engraved paper = its limestone cladding). Other art forms higher up the Hegelian chain of *aufhebung* more readily contemplate this possibility. In Stephen King's novella *The Langoliers*, the langoliers are little spheres which race along the airport runway shredding the visual world under the wheels of the accelerating 747 like sheets of paper, revealing not the earth fill under the tarmac but an impenetrable black emptiness. In *Village of the Damned*, George Sanders tries to keep the mind reading devil-children from penetrating his head so he can detonate his bomb. He does it by imagining a wall. The wall is crumbling visibly before their gaze. Behind it, his mind's eye, lurks psychic annihilation.<sup>36</sup>

The opacity of the visual field predicated by LeCorbusier's phenomenally transparent work is acknowledged at Garches by the thin strip of space which delaminates the *façade libre* from the plan. This space announces that the



The flatness of depth

*façade* floats, and is not a projection of the plan in the manner of, figuratively speaking, the renaissance *façade* or, literally speaking, the *Bauhaus* elevations. The vertical depth relation

(perpendicular to page, perpendicular to *façade*, the line of sight) is severed by a series of sharp shallow striations of space. This space also announces that the *façade* has a phenomenal thickness, a thickness which exists as a visual reality, corresponding to but distinct from the literal but invisible thickness of the bearing wall masonry *façade* of, e.g., the renaissance palazzo.

#### The screen and the flatness of depth

We ended the discussion of the Minim chapel with the possibility of an equivalence between 2- and 3- dimensional space; such that perspective is a 2-dimensional representation of a 3-dimensional space, and architecture a 3-dimensional representation of a 2-dimensional space. This is not belied by Lacan's tripartite diagram of the structure of the scopic field, the *operational montage* which was achieved by montaging one perspective diagram inverted upon another. On one reading, a viewing subject, is located opposite its object, with a screen in between.

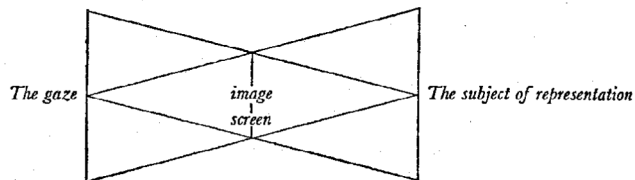
The object is the gaze, which objectifies the subject. By a related reading, the real (gaze) is located opposite the symbolic (the viewing subject, subject of language), with the imaginary (screen, bearer of images), in between.

Students sometimes model it by setting up two slide projectors aimed either side of a back projection screen.

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, the screen is that which:

- has as an analogue the picture surface;
- fractures in cases of anamorphosis;
- goes opaque when kissed by Narcissus (desire);
- is the site of the *objet a* (object of desire, trauma of the real);
- had its first iteration as the mirror in the mirror stage;
- is sublimated by the symbolic order.

at the apex of the second triangle. The two triangles are here superimposed, as in fact they are in the functioning of the scopic register.



I must, to begin with, insist on the following: in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture.

The screen does not support the tripartite reading for long. It seems to be the herald of a resolutely 2-dimensional world. To the extent that the *operational montage* is

read as spatial, it collapses as soon as we remember that the screen is the opaque site for the representation of space. In each iteration of the screen in different contexts - Minim chapels, architectural *tromp l'œil* painting, modern architecture - we are led to the conclusion that the screen predicates an identity between 2- and 3- dimensions. In the visual register, all images are projections in two dimensions. There is nothing but

the screen. The gaze and the subject, to the extent that they are geometric positions, are inscribed on the screen. Likewise for space. The screen is identical to the visual field.

The extent to which the diagram represents the structure of the subject (of psychoanalysis) in the imaginary register, it is not spatial at all, except in a metaphorical sense. In this case, the structure is not tripartite, but bipartite: it is a screen vis-à-vis projections. The subject does not look at the screen, the subject is the screen. The subject is a surface. The other positions - gaze, ego - are projections of that surface. One position seems to the subject to be the point from which the subject looks; the other the point from which the subject feels looked at. These two positions are about two different identifications that the subject makes, and in the realm of subjecthood, all identifications are self-identifications. The gaze is inside each subject.<sup>37</sup> The gaze is the manifestation of the *objet a* in the visual field (it manifests differently in different drives), and the *objet a* is 'the little bit of the subject lost to the subject'.<sup>38</sup> In Lacan's tuna can story, the glint of light represents the little bit of himself which he does not understand, the bit he feels uncomfortable with, is alienated from, misrecognises (he thought he might be a fisherman, in fact he's a poor little rich kid).<sup>39</sup>

#### *Objet petit a*

Phenomenal flatness suggests something about the reading of architecture. It directs our attention toward the surfaces of architecture, and upon any architecture which manifests as surface, whether it be the literal

opacity of *Villa Schwob*, the phenomenal opacity of *Villa Stein*, or the screeny graphicy aesthetics of e.g. Jean Nouvel or Rem Koolhaas, whose spaces seem to manifest as series of screens of varying degrees of translucence and reflection depending upon the amount of information they are required to carry.

It suggests further that the surfaces upon which we might expect the *objet a* of architecture to be found are the surfaces of photographs of architecture, and not on the walls, nor even the painted or reflected walls, of architecture. It is not merely that the photograph ensures that we are in a discourse of surface and flatness (a kind of corrective against errant discourse). Rather: the sign of the *objet a* in architecture has to do with the relationships which an architecture establishes with the media of representation. We are looking for an architecture which, like the psychoanalytic subject, represents itself to itself; accepting in this predicament, the scope for misrecognition. We are no longer interested in using Lacanian discourse to position the subject of perception in architecture. This is Colomina's turf. According to the present reading of Lacan, architecture *is* the subject. Architecture represents itself. We know from the mirror stage (although it is never said so clearly) that *the little bit of the subject lost to the subject* is the subject's image. An identity is gained, an image is lost. In a similar vein, the relation of architecture to its image is one of identity and loss. This harks back to the originary dialectic between a primitive architecture and its representation by painting. Perspective painting is the mirror stage of architecture, and thereafter architecture is involved in 'a drama whose internal thrust

is precipitated from insufficiency and anticipation'<sup>40</sup> The mirror stage is the birthing scenario of the *objet a* in which the subject loses its *objet a* to an image, and we hope to capture it in a photograph.

*Objet a* might only appear in an image of architecture, and not in architecture itself. Or only appear in the space between architecture and its image. In *The Return of*



*Objet a* at Ville d'Avray: Architecture representing itself

*the Real*, Foster suggests that the repetitive screen printing of Warhol's Marilyns are an attempt to screen the real. He is particularly attentive to the effects of

repetition and misregistration.<sup>41</sup> Following Foster, we begin our search by looking for repetitive facades and serial spaces, which are the effect of the architecture representing itself. Having been appraised of the nature of the screen, we might look for repetition in photographs of architecture and not architecture itself. We might find symptoms of the *objet a* in, say, the visual misregistrations between architecture and its image, as if Lacan's slide projector were no longer perfectly registered on his interior. We might begin by looking at photographs of Foster's new Reichstag, which brings glass in...

This underscores the fact that the psychoanalytic subject is culturally and historically determined. The *objet a* (under any name) was not available to the subject of perception until the accidental discovery of the power



of mirrors one fine day in the primordial forests of Classical Greece. It might not have been available to the subject until the invention of perspective projection, and perhaps not fully available to the general public until the invention of photography.

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<sup>26</sup> The silent r of Parrhasios marks him like the a of *differance*. As if there were another painter called *Parhasios* who was just a really good illusionistic painter like Zeuxis.

<sup>27</sup> See for instance Robert Ryman's (1930-) *Ledger* (1983).

<sup>28</sup> Absalon (1964-1993) was an Israeli-French artist.

<sup>29</sup> Laugier's image shows a personification of architecture gesturing regally toward the hut. Because of her position next to it but not in it, because of her position as personification on high, because of her Olympian remove (intellectualist) from the cares of the world, she will only ever have an anamorphic view of her primitive hut (= gaze in the architectural field, or Other of the subject).

<sup>30</sup> The illusionistic painting of an curtain is quite different from the painting of grapes or most any other objects. It is a visual pun (source of psychoanalytic insight).

<sup>31</sup> *Villa Schwob*, 1916, La Chaux-de-Fonds. Colin Rowe relates the façade to a mannerist façade motif (Rowe, 'Mannerism and modern architecture'). *Schwob* used a prototype concrete frame which was refined in later works as the Domino frame, one of the icons of modernism. The *Schwob* facade is thus an answer in advance to the literal transparency of the *Bauhaus*.

<sup>32</sup> See for instance the blank *graphed* facades of Jean Nouvel. In the *Cartier* headquarters (1990), and several other corporate projects, the signs and characteristics of the interior are erased by repetitive writing on glass. Using different means altogether, the stultifying repetition of the same block form in Hilberseimer's urban projects (1924, 1930), suggests a problematising of representation, and a consequent sense of erasure.

<sup>33</sup> Baldessarri Peruzzi (1481-1536), the *Hall of Perspectives*, *Villa Farnesina*, Rome (ca. 1512).

<sup>34</sup> All these examples are mentioned in Baltrusaitis.

<sup>35</sup> Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, 'Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal', reprinted in Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and other essays*. (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1976) pp159-183. First published in *Perspecta*, the Yale Journal of Architecture, 1963. No one has made much of the connection between phenomenal transparency and the screen in Lacan's imaginary register, although Anthony Vidler suggests that there ought to be one in 'Transparency' in Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994) pp217-226.

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<sup>36</sup> See Stephen King, *The Langoliers*, published in the collection, *Four Past Midnight*. (New American Library, 1991). See *Village of the Damned*, 1960, directed by Wolf Rilla, starring George Sanders, screenplay by Rilla and Stirling Silliphant. Based on a novel by Wyndham Lewis, *The Midwich Cuckoos*, 1957.

<sup>37</sup> This is born out by the genesis of the *operational montage* in the mirror stage. The mirror stage is one half of this diagram. The positions of subject and gaze are superimposed by the reflective power of the mirror.

<sup>38</sup> Foster, op cit., p. 141

<sup>39</sup> 4FCPA p95

<sup>40</sup> Lacan, 'The mirror stage' in *Ecrits, A selection*. (New York: Norton, 1977) P4.

<sup>41</sup> Foster, op cit., pp 127-170.

## Lacan's metaphor is architecture

### *Gilded mirrors*

It is clear that Lacan has a deep affinity for the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Baroque interior, the kind with huge mirrored wall panels surrounded by gilded frames with lots of curlicues, mirrors that replicate rooms endlessly, interiors which never end. No other architecture matches the convoluted, folded, anamorphic nature of his thought and language, as does the interior and plot of that consummate mirror movie, whose namesake is the town which hosted the conference where 'The mirror stage' was read.<sup>42</sup> This is an architecture whose aesthetic and spatial effect



The mirror stage

is based upon the mirror's potential for endlessly replicating and fracturing space upon its surface, and it is closely linked to the work

of virtuoso perspective two-pointers like the Bibiena Bros., Scenographers, who produced endlessly replicating stage interiors.<sup>43</sup>

This architecture recalls the engravings of the Minim chapels, which in turn recalls the *camera obscura*, all of which are machines for the projection of space upon the interior and whose effect depends upon the dialogue between 2- and 3- dimensional surfaces. It recalls Lacan's originary architecture, in its exchange between image and architecture, projected picture and interior. It is an

architecture of almost obsessive attention to surface and surface encrustation, framing, multiplicity, and most importantly, the surface effects of language at the expense of depth; the architecture which an ideologue die-hard structuralist like LeCorbusier called *les horreurs de Rome*, all the while illustrating some of the most beautiful interiors in Rome, including the painted *tromp l'œil* state rooms of *Castell Sant' Angelo*.<sup>44</sup> It is an architecture with correspondingly little interest in overt manifestation of structural geometry and organisation, in plan and façade, which are the signs and characteristics of both the Italian renaissance and European modernism.

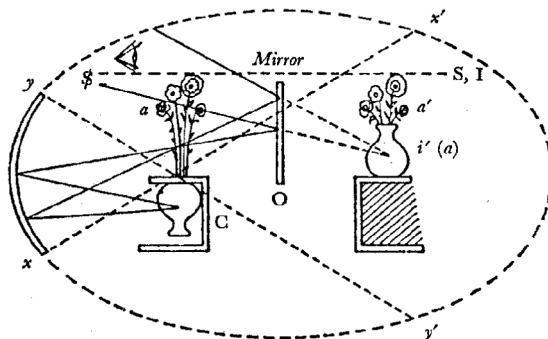
These observations make the sense of his text clearer, but they raise the question of the metaphoricity of the text generally (the subject is a boudoir), and specifically, the relation of his machines to the structure of the psyche. We can ask, for instance, what is the status of the mirror in the mirror stage.<sup>45</sup> I provisionally distinguish metaphor from model. In metaphor, something in one register explains the function or structure of something in another. Lacan uses anamorphosis to explain the emergence of desire in the subject. He relates a phenomenon in painting to a state of mind, which involves jumping registers from painting to psyche. Model is reserved for more direct relations between terms, as when they inhabit the same register and can be in one-to-one correspondence. A scale model is a model of a building because they are both objects, but a photograph has a metaphoric relationship to the building, if it exposes certain relationships, as for instance LeCorbusier's photographs of Ville d'Avray, which pose the question of an architectural gaze.

Similarly, in that order [the order of images], which is particularly satisfying for the subject, connoted in psycho-analytic experience by the term *narcissism* - in which I have striven to reintroduce the essential structure it derives from its reference to the specular image - in the satisfaction, not to say self-satisfaction, that diffuses from it, which gives the subject a pretext for such a profound *méconnaissance* - and does its empire not extend as far as this reference of the philosophical tradition represented by plenitude encountered by the subject in the mode of contemplation - can we not also grasp that which has been eluded, namely the function of the gaze?[4FCfPA p74]

So, what is the status of the mirror in the mirror stage? 'The mirror stage' lays the groundwork for the imaginary order. It is a reading of Freud's '*On Narcissism: an Introduction* (1914)'.<sup>46</sup> Lacan's self reflective world of virtual images is a metaphoric elaboration on Freud's use of words like *projection* and its cognates (N p88) and *self regard* (N p92 ff.). It has the same metaphoric status as does the mythic narrative of Narcissus. This confirms:

- that the scopic field, whose structure is diagrammed by the *operational montage* is in the subject's head; and,
- that the *geometral point* of Lacan's gaze is Freud's *ego ideal*, ('imposed from without' (N p95) 'it is the common ideal of a family class or nation' (N p96)); and,
- that consciousness - which is that *observing agency* (N p91 n1) which monitors the ego on behalf of the *ego-ideal* - is the self-reflexive series of relationships diagrammed by the *operational montage*.

Lacan differs from Freud on the role of the voice. Although he does not rule voice out, he insists upon the temporal priority of the imaginary order. Thus he maintains in 'The mirror stage' that the subject's identification with its mirror image occurs 'before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject' (p2), 'before its social contraposition. It is the subject's game of odds and evens constituted by his renewed meetings with that which in the determination' (p2).



An optical architecture

In 'The two narcissisms' and 'The ego-ideal and ideal ego' (Seminar 1: *Freud's papers on technique*), Lacan defines the relation between voice and image with his optical

device; and this device, while it would be a fantastic

model for an architecture (in league with the *camera obscura* and Plato's cave, or Laugier's primitive hut, or Absalon's), it can only be understood metaphorically when applied to the subject of perception. It is an elaborate machine with plane and concave mirrors, which situate the virtual image of the subject (narcissistic identification, future *objet a*) within an environment of real images (visual field). This catoptric environment represents the imaginary order, but the symbolic order determines the angles of the mirrors, and hence determines what is reflected back to the subject.<sup>47</sup> It models certain relationships, but they bear no direct relation to the subject, either projective, formal, scalar, etc. It is only by a metaphoric leap, the leap that allows meaning to travel, that we can call them models.

We will provisionally accept that one-eyed space is not the same as two-eyed space, and that therefore we cannot make a corresponding identity between the scopic field and the visual field as we could between the 2- and 3- dimensional iterations of the screen. The photograph is identical to the scopic field/screen because it is synchronic, instantaneous, single point, stationary, and opaque.<sup>48</sup> This is another reason for using the photograph of an architecture, and not the architecture, in our scopic analysis. To define the metaphoric relationship between scopic and visual fields more precisely, we have to re-enter Lacan's text.

The production of meaning

Lacan defines metaphor as the replacement of one signifier by another along the vertical substitutive axis of language.<sup>49</sup> This vertical stack of signifiers is a kind

of meaning vending machine. This year's signifier is pushed out the bottom to become next year's signified. Thus meaning is continually created and circulated around the world. Interpretation - including this paper's - is one of the ways that visual images are brought into the symbolic order. (By writing, I refuse to let the image remain an image, and delineate its significance.) Lacan's sublimation is a special case, whereby the image enters the symbolic order, and in particular the anamorphic image becomes a signifier for absence and emptiness. It is the special case because it is the originary one, which



You never look at me from the place from which I see you.

inaugurates meaning, where before there had only been images which were not signifiers.<sup>50</sup> But it applies equally to the relation of the mirror to operational montage. Within Lacan's text, the mirror is the sign of a series of intra-subjective relations.

In the case of the architecture that represents itself, its projected image becomes the signifier, behind which the architecture, the signified, is screened. There are other ways that things can be related in Lacan's text (there are metonymic relations), but at the level of meaning, this is all there is. Metaphor is the site of interpretation, and it does not get better than this.

The final species of emptiness is architecture in its pre-linguistic state, which is not known, but must be posited in order to hold Piranesi's stones up. It precedes meaning; it is what holds meaning together, the cement



(cement was invented by the Romans) which cements the metonymic relationship of signifiers on the signifying chain. The cement which will be next year's image on the metaphoric axis. (Are signifiers pushed off the top of the stack as well?) Alternatively, it is architecture at a time before the symbolic order, when it is the potential but not yet realised site for meaning. Not an architecture empty of Spirit à la Hegel, but an architecture empty of meaning because meaning has not yet been invented, which may be more or less the same thing, since meaning is the province of Spirit. In this case, the image does not screen a lumpen real; until its integration into the symbolic, the image is the lumpen real.

Lacan's project aligns Freud with 20<sup>th</sup> century French thought. Lacan integrated Freud to Saussurean linguistics (the subject is an effect of language) in a manner analogous to Levi-Strauss' application of linguistics to anthropology. One of the points of this paper is that Lacan effected a similar integration of Freud into visual thought. Lacan started with Freud's 'On narcissism' ('The two narcissism' and 'The ego-ideal and ideal ego' in Seminar 1). He stitches Freudian psychoanalysis, via Baltrusaitis' images of projecting machines, into the visual/ optical/ representation tradition, divested of its metaphysics and divine inspiration, which had already begun to model subjectivity and its relation to the world. Freud's thought was raw material, an empty lumpen real, the Freudian Thing, which required assimilation into the symbolic order of 20<sup>th</sup> century French thought and visual tradition. Lacan's project has the opposite sense to Piranesi's project, picking up Piranesi's stones to restore the illusion of meaning to architecture.

We suggest that Lacan's use of non-enclosing topological forms like the Klein bottle, Mobius strip, or Borromean knot, which are discussed at length in Seminar 13, are part of the same project. On this view, Freud failed to integrate psychoanalysis into the physical sciences, a project he was ambivalent about. Lacan - dubious also, of this project - looks instead to the discourse of formal mathematics (at least 'scientific' if not empirical). The mobius, for instance, has two sides but only one surface. Its logic can articulate a binary opposition, interior/exterior, but the terms are seen to run into each other.<sup>51</sup>

These forms offer interesting challenges to ways of thinking about architecture, because architecture and space-making, typically conceived, are about enclosure and threshold. Emptiness might be more clearly articulated outside a discourse of closure because then it would be more difficult to conflate with an empty nave; and it is possible that an architecture of, e.g., folded surfaces (Greg Lynn's?) would have a manifest affinity to the screen. The articulation of emptiness within a mobius space is an obvious next step for this paper.

These forms also raise interesting problems about their status, metaphoric or otherwise, in Lacan's text. According to Schneiderman, Lacan adopted these forms in response to an enlightenment tradition which produced the unfathomable suffering of two world wars, an intellectual tradition which valorises the systematic, is founded on binary oppositions, and whose formal metaphors include, e.g., Plato's cave, the Trojan horse, the *camera obscura*. If Hitler might have listened to Mozart and read Kant, what hope does anti-fascist intellectual resistance offer - be

it communism, existentialism, etc. - since it inhabits the same forms of thought. Because of their resistance to closure, and their conflation of inside and outside surfaces, the Klein bottle et. al. have the potential to offer the model of a new form of subjectivity. Similarly, Lacan's seminars almost never provide the satisfaction of intellectual mastery, of finally arriving at a conclusion, but remain critically open.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Last Year in Marienbad* (Alain Resnais, director, Alain Robbe-Grillet, screenplay) is set in a Baroque chateau of mirrors and is about the replication and fracturing of experience in appearance and memory, in particular, how desire unfolds in the register of images real and virtual. See the screenplay (New York: Grove Press, 1962).

<sup>43</sup> The Bibiena family were the most prolific practitioners of the Bolognese school of *quadratura* or illusionist architecture. Two generations of brothers dominated the scene from last quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, producing elaborate one- and two- point perspective screens for stage sets. Lacan never talks directly about two-point perspective, in which the vanishing point does not align with the position of the I/eye of the subject. It is not clear what about the gaze and the blind spot changes once this structural identification is abandoned.

<sup>44</sup> LeCorbusier, *Vers une Architecture*, 'La leçon de Rome'. (Paris: 1923).

<sup>45</sup> It must be noted that all psychoanalytic texts are metaphoric; even to use the words *entity* or *structure* in connection with the psyche is to attribute the properties of material (contour, thingness) to what is immaterial and known only through its linguistic symptoms and traces.

<sup>46</sup> Lacan, 'The mirror stage', in *Ecrits, a selection*. (New York: Norton, 1977). Page references in text. And: Sigmund Freud, 'On narcissism: an introduction (1914)', in *On Metapsychology*, Volume 11 of *The Penguin Freud Library*. (London: Penguin, 1984). Henceforth referred to in text as N.

<sup>47</sup> Seminar 1, p.140, 'Now let's postulate that the inclination of the plane mirror is governed by the voice of the other.'

<sup>48</sup> By synchronic I mean that the time - a past moment - in each photograph is equivalent.

<sup>49</sup> I am dependent upon Evans, op cit., for this discussion. See Evans, entry on metaphor and metonymy.

<sup>50</sup> It is difficult to understand the pre-lingual status of the image, and the relationship it might have to the subject. The pre-lingual subject does not exist: it forms when it loses a little bit of itself to the Other, which loss happens in

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language. The *identification* to which Lacan refers in 'The Mirror Stage' would be something like the identification a bull makes when he charges the red cloth for the first time. This red has to precede signification as the theoretical limit of signification.

<sup>51</sup> Freud's 'the Uncanny' is a classic example of a mobius argument, in which two words of opposite sense, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, are shown to cohabit each other's surfaces. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' in *The Collected Papers of Sigmund Freud Volume IV*, transl. by Joan Riviere. (London: Hogarth Press, 1949).

<sup>52</sup> See Stuart Schneiderman, *Jacque Lacan, Death of an intellectual hero*. (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1983) chapter 8. This book suffers for not having a bibliography, footnotes, index, or chapter titles.

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